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# THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL JOURNAL

**The Old Settler**

**Tragedy on Independence Creek**

**The Spirit of Margaret McKenny: Loving the Natural World** **$5.00**

# THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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**Who/What/Where Is It?**

***On the cover:***

*Left: Margaret McKenny in her later years. Photograph C2018.0.15, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, Washington.*

*Top right: Watercolor of Margaret McKenny's cat, believed to have been painted by Margaret. Image courtesy of Sally Turnbull.*

*Bottom right: Eyeglasses worn by Margaret, and now in the collection of the Washington State Historical Society. Catalog ID number 2013.152.1, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, Washington.*

*See article on page 25.*

# TRAGEDY ON INDEPENDENCE CREEK

*James S. Hannum, M.D.*

The March 1914 issue of *The Timberman* magazine reports that the Ninemire & Morgan Lumber Company's mill, south of Rochester, had gone into operation. It was located on Michigan Hill Road, immediately south of Helsing Junction, in the southwest corner of Thurston County. Figure 1 details the geography in that region. The mill burned on August 29, 1924 and was not rebuilt. The associated logging railroad was removed in 1925,

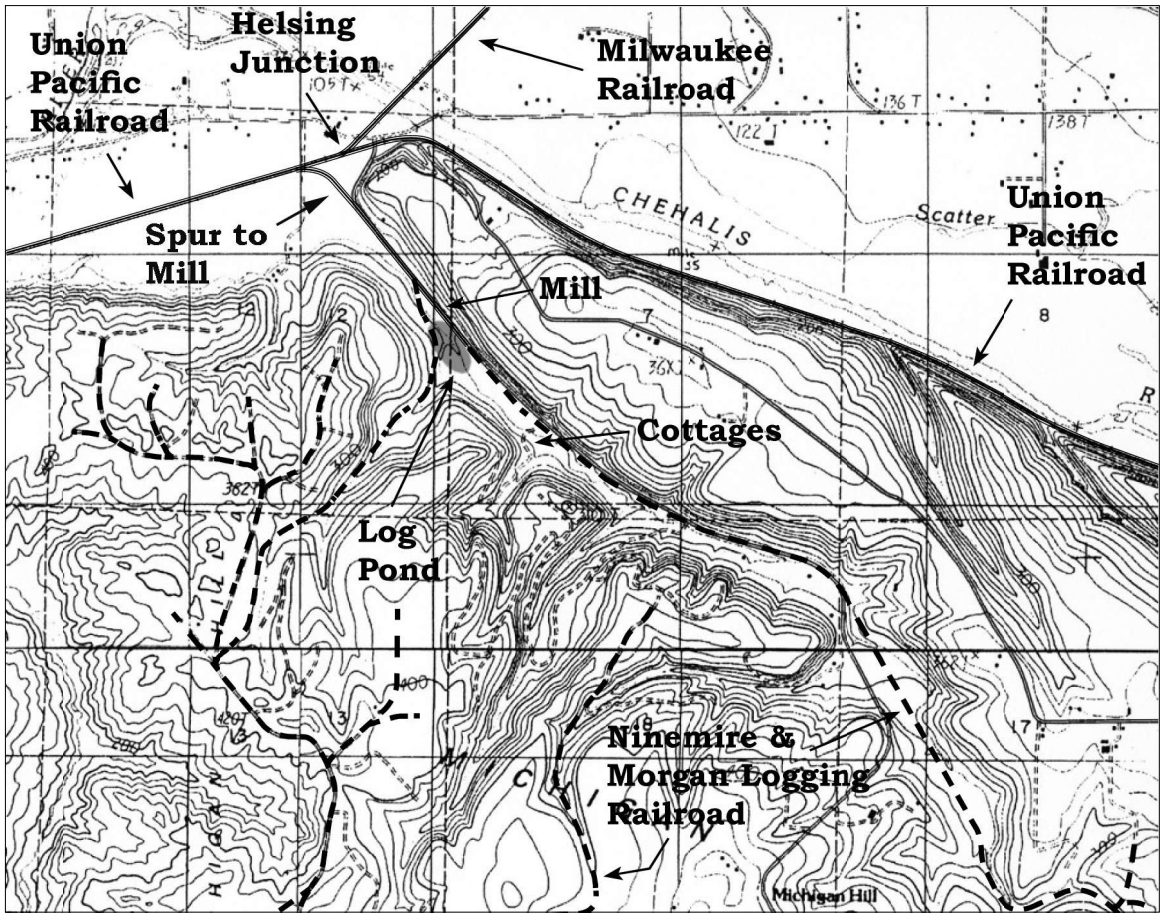



*Figure 1. Geography near the Ninemire & Morgan Lumber Company mill, located in southwest Thurston County, south of Helsing Junction and Rochester.*

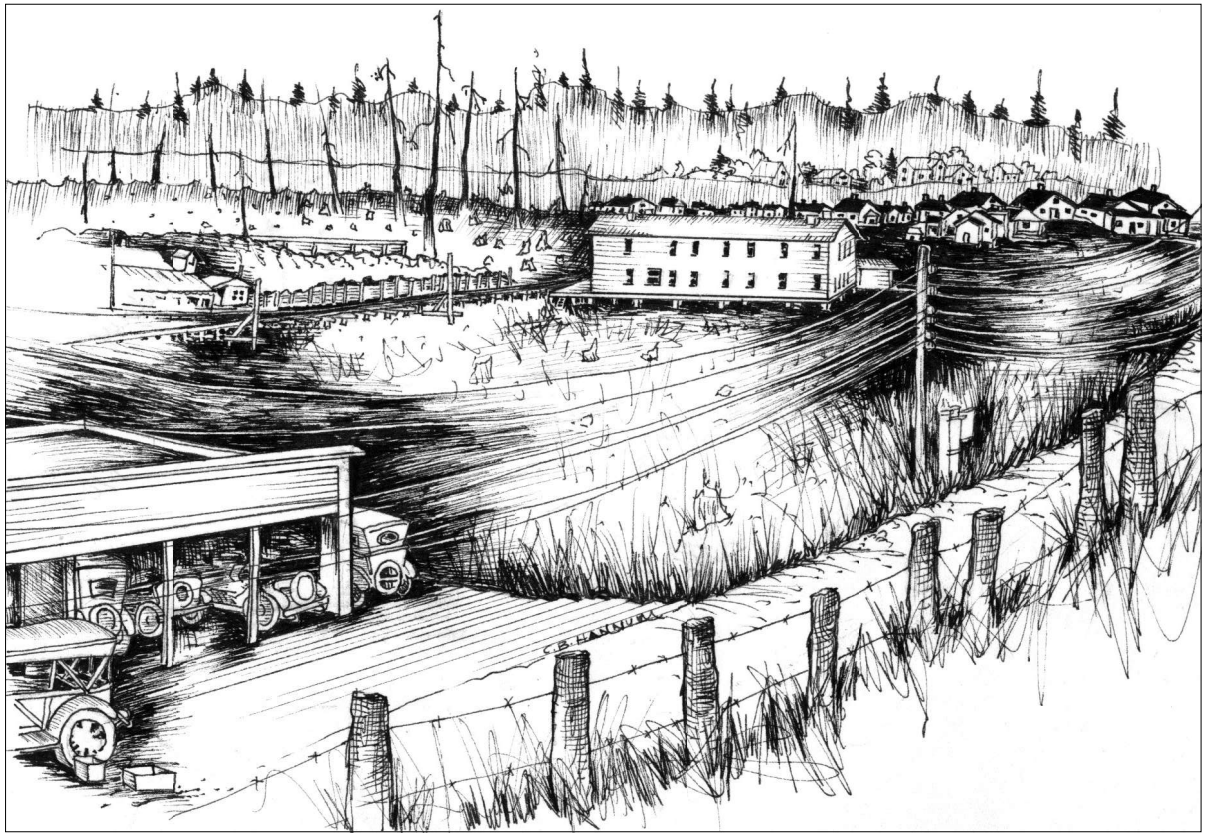


*Illustration of the Ninemire & Morgan mill, inspired by a circa 1920 photograph. The garage at lower left was located along the right-of-way of the county road, as it existed then. This is not the right-of-way occupied today by Michigan Hill Road. Above the garage can be seen the northern edge of the mill. The large building near the center is the company bunkhouse. Illustration by Carol B. Hannum.*

after all timber under contract to the company had been removed. I was gathering information about Ninemire & Morgan's railroad in 2001, and as part of that project, I interviewed Eleanor Montfort, who then resided in Centralia.[1]

Notes from that meeting include: "Her [Eleanor's] parents moved to a home immediately south of the (Ninemire & Morgan) mill in 1917, where Eleanor was born in 1926. She spent her childhood there and raised her own family in that house.

"When she was growing up, there was a mill pond immediately north of the house. The lumber company had created the pond by damming the East Fork of Independence Creek. South of the house was a long, narrow valley with bottom land suitable for farming.

*Circa 1920 view northwest toward the Ninemire & Morgan Lumber Company mill. Unseen, to the right of the mill pond, was the eastern segment of the company's logging railroad. Photo courtesy of the University of Washington, Clark Kinsey Photograph Collection, PH Coll 516.2183.*

Several cottages were located in the valley, south of Eleanor's home. In these cottages lived two immigrant Japanese families whose husbands worked in the mill. Years later, after the mill closed and the cottages ceased to exist, daffodils planted originally by the immigrants still came up in the fields plowed by Eleanor's husband each year. Unmarried Japanese men lived in the bunkhouse north of the mill, with thirteen shown there in the 1920 federal census.[2]

"In 1920, one of the cottages was the residence of 32-year-old Taichi (Taiichiro) Yamakawa and his family. The census declares that he, and his 26-year-old wife, Hide, were born in Japan. The family also included Midori Yamakawa, a two-year-old daughter, and George Hiroshi Yamakawa, the couple's ten-month-old son.

"Although many years have passed, and some details have become blurred, the sadness of a tragedy which occurred on Independence Creek could still be heard in Eleanor's voice. She recalled that the family's name was 'Yamaguchi,' and their son, two-year old 'Sammy,' had drowned in the creek. She does not have a personal memory of Sammy, having learned of him from her parents. Exact dates for his birth and death have not yet been found in available Thurston County records. Eleanor recalls that Sammy's mother suffered extreme mental anguish, to the point of mental illness, after losing her son. Eventually, she went (or was sent) back to Japan, apparently without the rest of her family.

"The rest of Eleanor's story is quite mystical. During the time she made her home on Michigan Hill Road, the voice of a young child was often heard outside the house. Sometimes, these were the sounds of a youngster play-

ing in the front yard. However, whenever she went to look, nobody was there. The most dramatic event occurred sometime after she was married. Her husband was working outside and heard a small child crying. Thinking that neighbors had come to visit, he came into the house to find out who was crying. But, there was no one else in the house besides Eleanor. At that point, they went outside and could still hear the wailing for another half of an hour. Both were certain that this was the spirit of Sammy, remaining at the place where he drowned."

Some situations do not seem to change as time goes by. In 2020, the United States is again grappling with issues relating to conditions encountered by immigrants who wish to make a new life in America. In reflecting on those issues, Eleanor's story came back to me. I wondered if the incon-

*The Ninemire & Morgan mill property, showing what is probably the mess hall. Photo courtesy of the University of Washington, Clark Kinsey Photograph Collection, PH Coll 516.2182.*

sistencies in this narrative could be resolved, and what has happened to the people involved (and their descendants) over the past century.

To that end, a variety of genealogical sources were examined, including, but not limited to, census records, the Washington Secretary of State's birth, death, and marriage indexes, and the online website *Ancestry*.

Beginning with the surname "Yamaguchi," no credible evidence could be found to suggest that anyone with that name was associated with the Ninemire & Morgan Lumber Company or ever lived at the company's camp on Independence Creek.

*Looking across Michigan Hill Road, 1991. The view is northwest, from the place which formerly was the south end of the log pond. Photograph courtesy of the author.*

## THE YAMAKAWA FAMILY

On the other hand, significant information was unearthed for the Yamakawa family. Taiichiro Yamakawa, a married man aged 27 years, arrived in Seattle in 1915, probably for the second time. He disembarked from the ship *Awa Maru*, which had sailed from Yokohama on March 15. His permanent home in the United States was stated to be "Lochister" (Rochester), and that was also to be his final destination upon his arrival. His closest relative in Japan was a brother who lived in Chikujo District of Fukuoka Prefecture; this is on Kyushu Island, in the southern part of the Japanese home islands. Taiichiro stated that his occupation was that of a sawmill worker.[3] Figure 2 is part of a 1916 map showing the location of Fukuoka Prefecture.

Taiichiro's wife was Hide Uchimaru Yamakawa. She arrived in Seattle on board the *Hawaii Maru* on May 12, 1916; she was a 21-year-old former resident of Fukuoka Prefecture. Her destination was the residence of her husband, I. Yamakawa, at "N.M.L. Co. Rochester, Wa."[4]

Sometime after the

1920 U.S. census was recorded, Taiichiro, Hide, and their two children must have moved from the Ninemire & Morgan mill and returned to Japan, for both parents reentered the United States at Seattle in March 1922. Neither of their children, George and Midori, were with them on the *Africa Maru*. On this entry, the parents' stated destination was Tacoma. Taiichiro noted his occupation was that of "hotel laborer."[5] However, Taiichiro's name does not appear in Tacoma city directories published by Polk, in the four years after 1922. He and his wife could not be located by examination of the 1930 federal census.

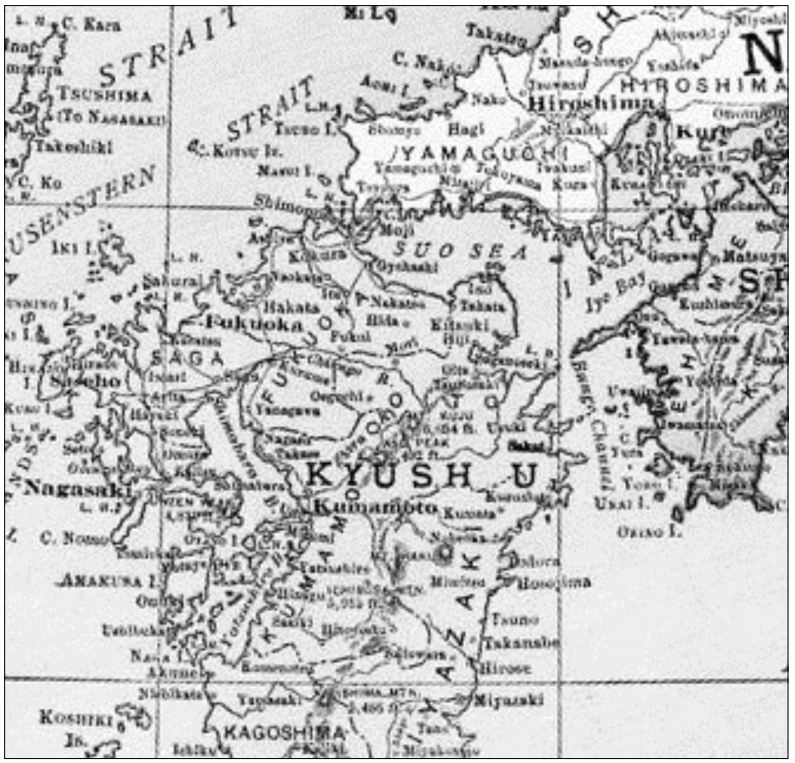



*Figure 2. City of Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture, Island of Kyusha, Japan, in* The Ideal Atlas of the World*, Rand, McNally and Company, 1916.*

Both Yamakawa children were born in Tacoma; Midori on October 21, 1917, and George on February 22, 1919.[6] Just one Japanese doctor, K. Ito, Physician and Surgeon, had an office there. The address was Room #2 in the New Tacoma Hotel, at 1354 ½ Broadway. That hotel was east of the Tacoma Union Station, in an area known as Japantown. Dr. Ito's residence was not far away, at 509 15th Street.[7]

Midori and George returned to the United States in the 1930s. Midori arrived unmarried in Los Angeles on October 30, 1937. She was a passenger on the *Tatsuta Maru*, one of three sister ships operated by Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK Line) in the company's premier, Orient-California service. At entry, her last permanent address was Fukuoka Prefecture.[8] The 1940 federal census reports that she was married to Harry Ono and the couple had a two-year-old son, Richard. Even though she was an American citizen, having been born in the United States, Midori was interned during World War II at Heart Mountain, Wyoming.[9] She eventually returned to Los Angeles, and was a resident of Huntington

Beach when she died May 12, 1998.

George Hiroshi Yamakawa disembarked from the *Heian Maru* at Seattle on May 29, 1935. His last residence was said to have been Japan and his destination was Tacoma. The record indicates that his father, Taiichiro Yamakawa, was then living in Fukuoka Prefecture, at the town of Uenokawachi, in the neighborhood of Nishisumida-Mura.[10] George obtained a passport visa in Tacoma July 25, 1940 and returned to Japan. He reentered the United States at Los Angeles on May 31, 1941; his declaration, at that time, indicates that his last permanent address was in Los Angeles. He arrived on the *Tatsuta Maru*.[11] George was interned during the war at the Tule Lake Relocation Center in California.[12] Afterwards, he returned to the Los Angeles area, where he died August 1, 2005.

*Figure 3. City of Kushimoto, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan, in* The Ideal Atlas of the World, *Rand, McNally and Company, 1916.*

### THE KIYONO FAMILY

Kiyono was the surname of the other immigrant family living south of the Ninemire & Morgan mill, near Eleanor Montfort's home. Shinkichi Kiyono, a married man born in Japan, sailed from Kobe, Japan on the *Yokohama Maru* on October 10, 1915. He had been in the United States previously, for his last permanent address was said to have been Tacoma, and Tacoma was his stated final destination. He was a 28-year-old sawmill worker (born November 5, 1886) who had gotten married the year before, during his return visit to Japan.[13] The 1920 federal census reports that the given name of Shinkichi's wife was Tetsu. She arrived in Seattle in 1916 aboard the *Inaba Maru* (NYK Line), which sailed from Kobe, Japan, on October 24. Tetsu was 22 years old; birth certificates (in the United States) of the Kiyono family's children indicate that her maiden name was Fujii. The 1916 arrival record mentions that she was from Fujibayashi Mura (Fujibashi Mura), Nishi Moro (Nishimuro) District, Wakayama Prefec-

*A circa 1920s photograph of Shinkichi Kiyono, his wife Tetsu, and one of their children. Photo courtesy of Lisa Nakatsu, a granddaughter of the Kiyono family.*

ture.[14] The 1940 draft registration card of her husband, Shinkichi, notes that he was an employee of the Carlisle Lumber Company mill at Onalaska in Lewis County, and had been born in Kushimoto, located in Higashimuro District of Wakayama Prefecture.[15] Figure 3 locates Wakayama Prefecture, in 1916.

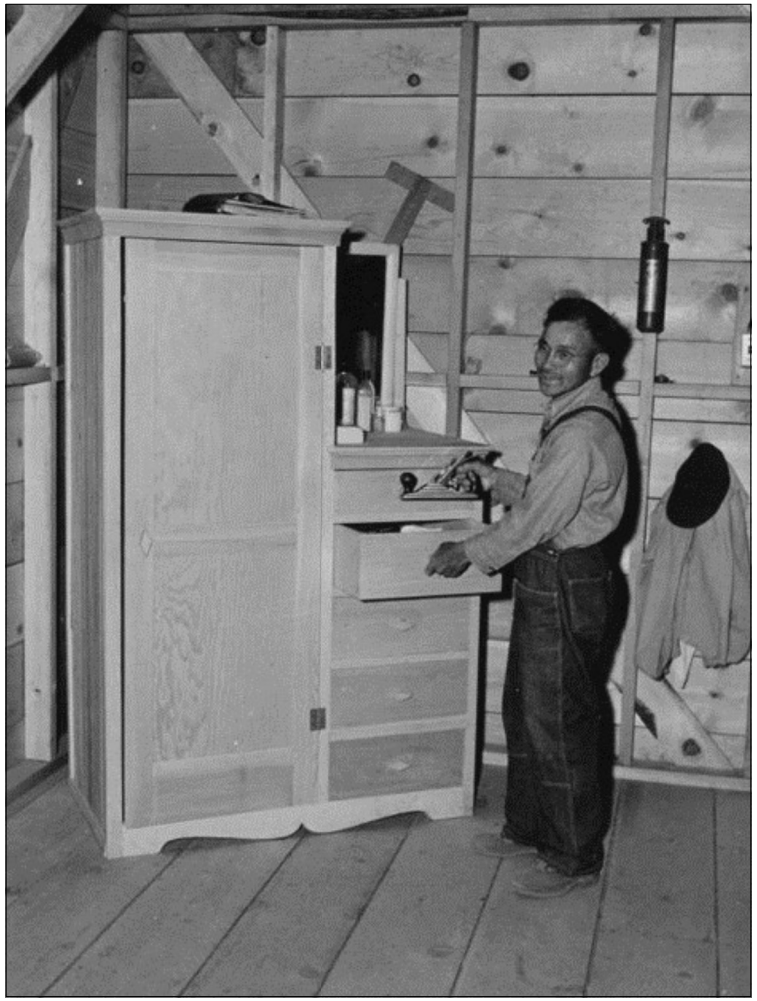
Shinkichi and Tetsu had several children in Washington State. Yoshiko K. Kiyono was born September 5, 1917, in Thurston County. Eventually, she married Robert Nakatsu who, in 1955, was the proprietor of Bob's Grocery in Seattle. That same year, Yoshiko was a clerk at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Seattle.[16] She held the job of financial manager at that hospital upon her retirement in 1980.[17] She died November 26, 2009 in Bellevue.

Other children of Shinkichi and Tetsu include: daughter Chiyeko, born 1920; daughter Kazue, born 1923 (valedictorian of the 1940 graduating class at Onalaska High School); son Masami, born August 16, 1925 (vice-president of the 1942 class at Onalaska High School);[18] and another daughter, Mary Michiyo Kiyono, born 1927.

It might be significant that Masami (the second "a" in this name is pronounced as is the "o" in "hobby") was born in the year before Eleanor Montfort's birth, probably right after the Kiyono family moved to Onalaska. "Masami" is a name that is commonly given to both boys and girls. However, the nickname "Sami" is typically used only for girls.

Also, possibly significant is the fact that the Kiyonos had one additional child, who died before his first birthday. His birth certificate erroneously calls him "Kaomi Kiyono" and mentions that he was a male child, born April 27, 1919 in Pierce County.[19] The baby's death certificate correctly indicates that his given name was Naomi, and he passed away at 3:00 a.m. on October 20, 1919 at "Scace's Hospital" in Centralia. The cause of death was "Pneumonia, Lobular, Bilateral." His family resided at Helsing Junction, where the father, Shinkichi, worked for "N. & M. Lbr. Co."[20]

The Scace Hospital was also known as the Employee Hospital, for it provided care for families of workers at about twenty area sawmills. The director was Lee A. Scace, M.D.[21]



*A photograph made July 1, 1942 at the Tule Lake Relocation Center, Newell, California. The caption reads: "Shinkichi Kiyono, 56, evacuee from Longview, Washington, exhibits the cabinet which won for him first prize (a carpenter's plane) in a furniture building contest. All pieces of furniture were made from scrap lumber." Photographer Francis Newell Stewart, California. Photograph D-15, from Online Archive of California. War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, 1942-1945, BANC PIC 1967.014—PIC, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

The baby's obituary appeared on page eight of the October 20, 1919 issue of *The Centralia Daily Chronicle*. "The funeral services of Naomi Kiyono, aged five months, 23 days, the infant daughter of S. Kiyono, of Rochester, were held this afternoon at 2 o'clock from the Sticklin Chapel, Rev. H. W. Thompson officiating. Interment was in the Sticklin Cemetery. The death of the child occurred this morning."

## Conclusion

Reviewing these data regarding the Yamakawa and Kiyono families is helpful in analyzing the story told by Eleanor Montfort. Her narrative may have been a blend of facts and events from both immigrant families. Certainly, none of her memories came from personal experience. Differences in language and social custom have probably added to the uncertainties noted here. But there must have been grains of truth contained in the tragic tale she told. The Kiyono family clearly had a child who perished. Medically speaking, a near-drowning can produce pneumonia. The Yamakawa family had a son, Masami, who may have been nicknamed "Sami"; this might have been interpreted as "Sammy" by Eleanor's parents. Moreover, the Yamakawa family did return to Japan, at least for some period, between 1920 and 1922. Much time has passed since these events, and now, there probably is no way to be certain about what happened on Independence Creek a century ago.

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## Notes

[1] The 1930 federal census of Grand Mound Precinct of Thurston County, Washington reports that Eleanor D. Chaussee lived on Michigan Hill Road. She was the four-year-old (born January 26, 1926) daughter of Raymond F. and Mary A. Chaussee. Her first husband was Hoyt Countryman; after being widowed, she married Bill Montfort.

[2] Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920-Population, Washington, Thurston, Rochester Precinct, Sheet 17A, "N. & M. Saw Mill B. H."

[3] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, Series Number M1383, Arriving Seattle, 1890-1957, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," *S. S. Iwa Maru*, Passengers Sailing from Yokohama, Japan 15th March 1915.

[4] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, Series Number A3691, Arriving Seattle 1890-1924. Arrived May 12, 1916, Ship *Hawaii Maru*.

[5] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, Series Number M1383, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Seattle, Records of the Immigration and

*A Ninemire & Morgan mill logging site, showing two small bunkhouses of a type commonly moved by rail from place to place as the site of active logging changed. The caption for this photo mentions "an Asian railroad construction crew." Photo courtesy of the University of Washington, Clark Kinsey Photograph Collection, PH Coll 516.2188.*

Naturalization Service, 1787-2004, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," *S. S. Africa Maru*, Passengers Sailing from Yokohama, Japan 15th March 1922.

6 Washington State Department of Health, Birth Index, 1870-1935.

7 *Polk's Tacoma City Directory, 1919*. Tacoma, Washington: R. L. Polk & Company, 1919.

8 National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Pedro/Wilmington/Los Angeles, Cali-

fornia, Record Group 85, *S. S. Tatsuta Maru*, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," Passengers Sailing from Yokohama, Japan, 12 October 1937.

[9] Midori Ono, in United States Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, Final Accountability Rosters of Evacuees at Relocation Centers, 1942-1946, Heart Mountain Relocation Center, November 1945, Volumes I and II.

[10] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, Series Number M1383, Arriving Seattle, 1890-1957, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," *S. S. Heian Maru*, Passengers Sailing from Yokohama, Japan, May 29, 1935.

[11] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Pedro/Wilmington/Los Angeles, California, Record Group 85, *S. S. Tatsuta Maru*, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," Passengers Sailing from Yokohama, Japan, arrival date in Los Angeles 31 May 1941.

[12] George Hiroshi Yamakawa in United States Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, Final Accountability Rosters of Evacuees at Relocation Centers, 1942-1946, Tule Lake Relocation Center, March 1946, Volumes I and II.

[13] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, Series Number M1383, Arriving Seattle, 1890-1957, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," *S. S. Yokohama Maru*, sailing from Kobe, Japan 10 October 1915.

[14] National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, Series Number M1383, Arriving Seattle, 1890-1957, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," *S. S. Inaba Maru*, sailing from Kobe, Japan 24 October 1916.

[15] Department of Selective Service, Registration Card (men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897), Serial Number U2318.

[16] AncestryLibrary.com, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, Seattle, Washington, City Directory, 1955.

[17] Obituary of Yoshiko K. Nakatsu. *The Seattle Times*, December 9-December 12, 2009.

[18] Brian Mittge, "Remembering The Day We Sent Our Neighbors Away," http://www.chronline.com/opinion/, affiliated with *The Daily Chronicle*, Centralia, Washington, June 2, 2017 (accessed 2018).

[19] Washington State Department of Health, *Washington State Births 1907-1919*.

*A section gang constructs a new segment of the Ninemire & Morgan logging railroad near Rochester. The caption for this photo mentions "an Asian railroad construction crew." Photo courtesy of the University of Washington, Clark Kinsey Photograph Collection, PH Coll 516.2191.*

[20] Naomi Kiyono, filed October 20, 1919. Washington State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death, Record Number 284, Registered Number 91.

[21] Herbert Hunt and Floyd C. Kaylor, *Washington: West of the Cascades. Vol. II.* Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1917, pages 610-611.

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